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EDWARD BRINLEY ADAMS

EDWARD B. ADAMS, who since September 1, 1913, has been Librarian of the Harvard Law School, died suddenly in Cambridge on March 24, 1922. He was born at Waltham May 6, 1871, and was the only son of Benjamin F. D. Adams and his wife Catherine Brinley. Both his father and his mother were of old New England stock, and he counted among his ancestors Peter Faneuil, who gave his name to Faneuil Hall, and Israel Putnam, whose vigorous character and daring exploits make him one of the most romantic figures of Revolutionary times. His ancestors belonged to that natural aristocracy which was typical of early New England, and which without great wealth, and with no legal privilege or special economic advantage, took and maintained a position of leadership in the community by sheer ability and force of character. Originally chiefly farmers, like most of the early New Englanders, they became clergymen or lawyers, doctors or merchants, as occasion served, were soldiers in time of war, active in town meetings in peace, and maintained a persistent tradition of intellectual ambition and active public service.

B. F. D. Adams, the father of Edward Adams, was a physician settled in Waltham, and had early become one of the leading men in New England, known and respected not only for his medical ability, but for his active and energetic public spirit. He was a leader not only in private practice, but in every form of public work connected with his calling, and the breakdown of his health in 1883 came as the result of too long-continued overwork. He contracted



tuberculosis of the lungs and found himself compelled to move with his family to Colorado Springs. His health benefited greatly by the change of climate, and until his death in 1895, although he never resumed practice as a physician, he led an active though necessarily a careful life.

The removal of his family from Massachusetts to Colorado had a marked effect on Edward Adams' development. His father and mother applied in their new environment the traditions brought from New England, and in a young and growing community such as Colorado was in those days, they naturally took a position of leadership. There was nothing worth while going on in which they did not have a part; no one of interest came to Colorado Springs who did not visit their house. The growing reputation of the place as a health resort brought people there not only from all parts of the United States, but from Europe as well, and gave the social life a cosmopolitan character unusual in America. To the New England background of the Adams' household was added something of the freedom of the West and something of the older European civilization. The European element no doubt was relatively small, but its effect was great on a mind as sensitive as that of young Adams. His culture always had a cosmopolitan character. He was able hospitably to receive a new idea, no matter from what source it came, and was free throughout his life from the tendency too common to New Englanders of applying the provincial yard-stick to every intellectual or moral question.

The last two years of his preparation for college were at the Browne and Nichols School in Cambridge, then recently founded by two young men, George H. Browne and Edgar H. Nichols, each of whom was a gifted teacher full of that enthusiasm for imparting knowledge which is the first requisite of good teaching. The number of pupils in the school was so small as to allow full effect to the contact between the teachers and the pupils, and his time at this school gave added stimulus to the intellectual curiosity which was part of Adams' inheritance. He entered Harvard in 1888, fitted to enjoy and to take full advantage of every opportunity which the college gave. His four years there were years of rapid and harmonious development. He was not only eager to learn from books, interested in music, in art, in politics, and in every form of human activity, but he was as keen in his interest

in men and women as in his interest in ideas, and he brought to his friendships the same delighted zest that he did to his intellectual activities. The outstanding thing that those who knew him in those days remember, was his extraordinary sensitiveness to impressions of every kind, and his keen and vigorous response to every sort of suggestion. Whether he was riding horseback, an exercise in which he delighted and excelled, or reading poetry, or going to the opera, or merely walking with a companion, he flung himself into whatever he did with an infectious delight.

He was never widely known in college, for he was too sensitive, too shy, and too deeply interested in what he was about to take the necessary trouble to cultivate a wide circle of acquaintances or to convert many from acquaintance to friendship, but he was liked and respected by those who knew him, and had an inner circle of real friends with whom he delighted to share his life as only a young man can. He graduated with honors in June, 1892, and entered the Law School in the following autumn.

In his first year in the Law School, Adams not only led his class in scholarship but, which by no means invariably follows, was recognized by his fellow students as a man of brilliant ability. In those days the Law School was still small enough so that substantially every man in each class knew something of every other, and the good men were known to practically every one who was in the school. There was then a unity of companionship and interest that to some extent has necessarily ceased with the present larger numbers. The student who showed up well in class, or who was intelligent in the constant discussion that went on outside the class-room, had his ability generally recognized far more easily than is the case today. If he had a vigorous personality and was a pleasant companion, as in Adams' case, he became one of a fellowship that not only worked hard but found ample time for the healthy pleasures of youth, which tasted all the better for the work with which they were intermingled. It was the time of the great faculty. Ames, Gray, and Thayer were in their prime; Judge Smith had just brought to the school a living example of the highest tradition of the American bench; Williston and Beale, as young and eager disciples, were just beginning their work as professors. The hard-fought battle of the partisans of the case system with its opponents was still fresh in men's minds, and this faculty were united by

common beliefs and the remembrance of a common victory. And because the place was still small the students not only knew each other, but knew the professors to a degree which has now become impossible. Students and professors alike were united in a common intellectual activity and a common point of view. Those questions of the ultimate wisdom of the common law, and of the ultimate value of the American Constitutional system, which as a result of the economic and class conflicts of the present time are today vexing the souls of student and professor alike, had not yet begun to make themselves felt. There was complete intellectual freedom; there were even keen differences of opinion between student and student and professor and professor. The boast of the school was that it taught men to think and to reverence nothing but truth. But the differences related to comparatively minor points and did not affect the fundamental harmony of the school. One must allow something for the pleasant afterglow in which every man views the things of his youth; but when such allowance has been made I believe it must be admitted that to have been a student in the Harvard Law School in the nineties was a great and rare opportunity. We were learning from teachers of unusual vigor and unusual personal charm doctrines, of the truth and intellectual value of which we had no doubts; we believed that the knowledge we were acquiring would be a weapon with which we could win our places in the world, and we were getting this training in a group of men whose common purpose and common characteristics made friendship between them easy and delightful.

Adams threw himself into the life of the school with the enthusiasm natural to his character. He learned all it had to teach, either from books or men. He gained friends, and he took his part in all the school activities. He was a member of the Pow-Wow Club, then the leading law club of the place; was an editor of the Law Review, and a member of the Phi Delta Phi, which in those days at least was a social organization, giving dinners that were more gay than serious over which the Eighteenth Amendment had as yet cast no blighting shadow. More important than these formal organizations, he was always a welcome member in the informal and shifting groups that met daily for work or for play. No one who was then in the school will fail to remember his lithe and wiry figure and his eager and

vivid personality; and among these few would have doubted that he would be one of those who in future life would naturally seek out the more combative side of his chosen profession and become a great and successful advocate and perhaps a leader in public affairs. What seemed to be his natural pathway was the Colorado bar, where his family's wide acquaintance would have made a start comparatively easy. Then in the summer of 1894 came one of those accidents which alter the whole course of a man's life.

While spending his vacation in Colorado Springs he was riding in the evening with some friends, and at a gallop turned in at the gateway of the Country Club across which a careless steward had stretched a piece of wire to bar out intruding cattle. His horse fell with him, and he sustained injuries from which he lay unconscious for nearly a month, and which kept him a helpless invalid for close upon a year. He was unable to return to the Law School until the autumn of 1896, and he graduated with the class of 1897. It was years before he was able to lead a normal, active life. Indeed he never fully recovered from the effects of the injury. His mind was as clear as ever and his grasp of ideas as firm as it had been before, as was shown by his work in the school, where he continued to maintain a high scholastic position; but he never regained his old power of rapid and forcible expression, and something of the old self-confidence and combativeness had permanently left him. His sensitive and delicate organization had sustained a shock that made it unfit to stand rough usage or to deal with the rougher sort of professional work. It is probable that the effect of the injury was ultimately the cause of his sudden and untimely death.

Adams would not have been Adams if he had yielded without a struggle. He tried active practice, first in Colorado, and later in Boston, where he was for a time counsel to the Police Commission and later to the Metropolitan Park Commission, and where he also carried on his private practice. He tried for a year the experiment of teaching in the Harvard Law School, where in 1902-1903 he conducted the course in Real Property. But it was manifest to his medical advisers, and ultimately even to himself, that he could not stand the physical strain of practice or of teaching. It seemed for a time as if his unusual character and great ability were likely

to be without adequate expression in his profession. In 1909 an opportunity came. There was a vacancy in the office of Librarian of the Social Law Library. That library occupies a room in the Court House in Boston and is used both by the Bench and by the Bar in such a way as to make it in effect, though not in form, a public institution. The managing committee is made up from among the leading lawyers of the city. To these Adams was well known, and there was no hesitation in his choice when they learned that he would accept the position. Four years of successful administration made him equally the obvious person to succeed Mr. Arnold as Librarian of the Harvard Law School when the latter resigned. Indeed the only doubt as to his appointment arose from the characteristic over-conscientiousness, which made the then Dean Thayer hesitate whether he was justified in yielding to his own judgment of Adams' superior fitness for the position, in view of the deep regard and affection in which he held him. He was appointed Librarian September 1, 1913, and from then until his death gave constant and devoted service to the library of the school. How valuable that service was, only those intimate with the Law School can easily realize. The library is an essential part of the machinery of the school; the amount required for its upkeep and necessary growth constitutes, after the salaries of the professors, the largest single item in its budget. The care and arrangement of its contents, and the wise selection of what additions should be made, call for the exercise of the greatest judgment and discretion. This judgment and discretion Adams possessed to a high degree. He had a wide and discriminating knowledge of legal literature. He was tireless in his efforts to acquire the technical knowledge that at first he lacked, and he brought to his work a legal ability and a breadth of culture far exceeding that of the average librarian. Before all, he gave to his work a zeal and enthusiasm for the Law School which inspired everything he did. Of him it could be said without a tinge of exaggeration that he loved the Law School with complete devotion, and that he would willingly have given his life if by so doing he could have better served it. It is probable that his constant exertion strained to the utmost his slender physical strength and that he would have lived longer if he had been content to work less. He had the capacity to sink his personal ambition in the work which he was doing, and to give himself to the school

without hope of personal reward or desire for personal distinction. It has been the glory of Harvard that it has always been able to inspire in some rare souls that complete and generous self-devotion. Adams is typical in this of what is noblest in the University, and he would have asked nothing more than to merge his personality in the greater life of the institution.

Arthur D. Hill.

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